

A
DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
REASON,

With Regard to
Religion and Divine Revelation.

Wherein is shewn,
That *Reason* either *is*, or else that *it ought to be*,
a sufficient Guide in Matters of Religion.
Occasioned by the Lord Bishop of *London's*
Second Pastoral Letter.

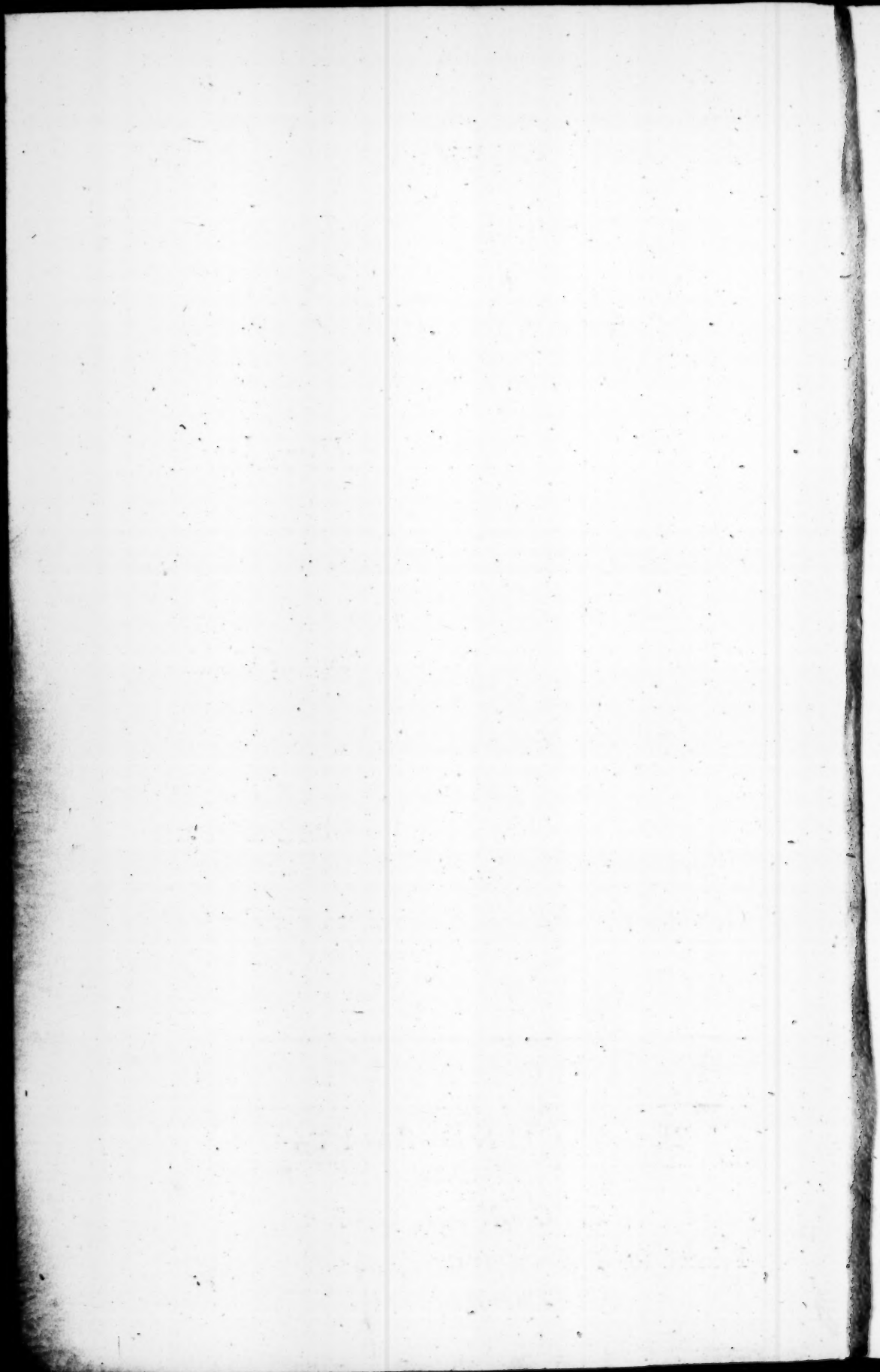
To which are added,
Some REFLECTIONS upon the comparative Excellency and Usefulness of moral and positive Duties.
Occasioned by the Controversy that has arisen (with Respect to this Subject) upon the Publication of Dr. *Clark's* Exposition of the Church Catechism.

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The SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N :

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A
DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
REASON,

Wherein is shewn,

That Reason is, or ought to be, a sufficient guide in matters of religion.

BY *reason*, I understand that faculty or power of the mind, by which men *discern* and *judge* of right and wrong, of good and evil, of truth and error, and the like. By *matters of religion*, I understand those things which men are *accountable for* to the Maker and Governor of the universe, and thereby render themselves the *proper objects* of reward or *punishment*. By a *guide* in matters of religion, I understand an *ability* or *capacity* (if carefully and faithfully exercised) to *discover* what it is which man, in reason and equity, is accountable for, and which will render him the proper object of divine favour or displeasure; and likewise a *capacity* to *discover* such *motives* to a right behaviour, as will be a balance to all those temptations which the present constitution of things unavoidably subjects him to. And, by a *sufficient* guide in matters of religion, I understand *such* a capacity or power in man, when duly exercised, as is *sufficient to answer these purposes*, without any thing superadded; and which

will render him, in justice and equity, *inexcusable* if he miscarries.

Having thus explained the terms which constitute the above proposition, I observe, that the point in question is not whether there be *absolutely* such a capacity or power in man, or whether man *can* neglect or misuse it, supposing him invested with such a power; but only that he either *has*, or else that he *ought to have*, such a capacity or power residing in him.

Man in his *natural state*, when destitute of *divine revelation*, is supposed to be an *accountable creature*, who is answerable to God for his actions, and who will be *amply rewarded* or *severely punished* in another world, according as he behaves himself in this. Now, admitting this to be the case, then, I say, that man has a *right*, by the laws of common equity, to be invested with *such a capacity or power*, as is *sufficient*, (when duly exetcised) to *discover* what it is he is *accountable for*; and what it is which renders him the *proper object* of *divine favour* or *displeasure*; and which likewise is *sufficient* to *discover* such *motives* to a right behaviour, as are an equal balance to all those temptations the present constitution of things unavoidably leads him into; and which capacity will, in *reason* and *equity*, render him *inexcusable* if he miscarries. I say, man considered as above, has a right, by the laws of common equity, to such a capacity; because if the case be otherwise, then he is *unfairly* and *unequally* dealt with. And if the present constitution of things be otherwise than what I have shewn it ought to be, such a constitution is manifestly *wrong*, by being *unequal* and *repugnant* to *reason*. It is as unequal in this case, as the requiring bricks without affording materials for the making them: It is the same, as laying a heavy burthen without giving strength to bear it; and punishing without a fault: all which are contrary to *reason* and *equity*, and therefore most cer-

certainly ought not to be. And what a horrid imputation is this upon the great *Maker* and *Governor* of the world! as if he wanted either *understanding* or *disposition* to have made and constituted things better, or to have dealt *fairly* and *equitably* with his creatures; which surely is very dishonourable to him, as it supposes him grossly defective, either in his *natural* or in his *moral capacity*. And,

The *injustice* in this case, is so plain and evident, even to the lowest understanding, as not to need many words to shew it to be so: it being evidently *unequal* and *repugnant* to *reason*, for God to call a species of creatures into being, to make them accountable for their actions, and to reward or punish them in another world, according as they behave themselves in this; and yet, not to furnish them with a capacity or power *sufficient* to answer the purposes of such creatures: I say, such a procedure is so *unequal* and *unreasonable*, as that the bare proposing the case, plainly shews it to be so, to every person that will but attend to it. And from hence it evidently follows, that if this be the truth of the case, then God must have been very *defective* either in his *natural* or his *moral capacity*; that is, he must have wanted either *understanding*, or *disposition*, to have made and constituted things better. And it will likewise as evidently follow, that reason either *is*, or that it *ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion, which is the point I undertook to make good.

If it should be urged, that *man*, as *originally constituted*, was endowed with such a capacity or power, as I have before described; but that by *Adam's* eating the forbidden fruit, this capacity was lost to him, and to all his posterity:

I answer; this does not at all help the case, because the inequality of the present constitution of things is the *same* to *mankind*, whether *Adam* had originally such a power, or not. And as our species

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was no way *accessary* to *Adam's* transgression; so it is very unreasonable and unequal, that they should be such *sufferers* by it, as the present argument supposes. That is, it is very unequal and unreasonable, that mankind should still be *accountable* for their actions, and should be *rewarded* or *punished* in another world, according as they behaved themselves in this; when they *lost* in *Adam* the capacity to discover what it is they are accountable for; and what it is which renders them the proper objects of God's favour or displeasure; and likewise what those motives to a right behaviour are, which would be an equal balance to all the temptations, that the present constitution of things unavoidably leads them into. Besides, such a constitution of things would be *wrong*. That is, it would be apparently wrong for things to be *so constituted*, as that the capacities of a whole species of agents (which capacities are of the utmost consequence to them) should be thus hazarded upon *one single fact only*; and that it should be left to the will and pleasure of *Adam*, whether this power, upon which our *all* depended, should remain to his numberless posterity, or not. So that, I think, the case must and will stand as I inferred above, *viz.* that either reason *is*, or else that it *ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion.

If it should be farther urged, that as *Adam* was originally endowed with such a capacity or power, as I have before described, so this capacity was not *sunk*, or *totally lost* to him and his posterity, by his transgression; but only, that thereby it became so *weakned* and *impaired*, as rendered it insufficient to answer the purposes for which it was intended; and that hereupon, *mankind* are not *unfairly* dealt with, neither is the present constitution of things *unequal*; because God will deal with, and judge every man, according to the ability he has, and not according to what he has not.

To this I answer; *first*, it does not appear from the history, that *Adam's* discerning faculty suffered *such a change* by his transgression, as is here supposed; but that the contrary is rather declared, as in *Gen. iii. 6, 7.* *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise; she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, &c. Verse 22. And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil, &c.* Here we see, that *Adam's* discerning faculty was so far from being weakned and impaired, that, on the contrary, it is represented as being rather *improved* by his transgression. And, if *Adam's sin* had no such effect upon himself, as to weaken and impair his own understanding, but had rather a contrary effect; why then should it be presumed, that his sin had such a physical effect upon the discerning faculties of *all his posterity*, as is here supposed; seeing there is nothing in the *history*, nor in *philosophy*, nor *experience*, to ground such a presumption upon? And as what is here presumed, ought not in reason to be admitted in argument; so it may more justly be presumed, that what is urged above, upon this head, is false and groundless. Again,

I answer, *secondly*, supposing *Adam's sin* had such a physical effect upon *all his posterity* (though it had no such effect upon himself) as that their discerning faculties became *weakned* and *impaired* thereby; then the proper question will be, whether the weakness which our species are fallen under by *Adam's* transgression *does not*, or whether it *does*, render us *incapable* of knowing and doing enough to make us the *proper objects* of *God's favour*; and to render us, in justice and equity, *inexcusable* if we miscarry. If the *former* be the case; that is, if the weakness
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which *Adam's* sin brought upon our species, *does not* render us incapable of knowing and doing, as afore-said, which seems to be implied in the objection (in which it is said, that mankind are not *unfairly* nor *unequally* dealt with, in and by the present constitution of things, and that God will deal with and judge every man, according to the ability they have, and not according to what they have not;) then, I say, that reason *is* a sufficient guide in matters of religion; and that it *is sufficient* (notwithstanding *Adam's* miscarriage) to answer the purposes for which it was intended, *viz.* to guide men to, and engage them in the practice of their duty here, and to bring them to *happiness* hereafter. But if the *latter* be the case, that is, if by *Adam's* transgression, the discerning faculties of all our species became so weakned and impaired, as to be *insufficient* for these purposes; then, I say, as before, that mankind are very *hardly* and *unequally* dealt with, in and by the present constitution of things; and that if reason *is not*, yet *it ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion. Surely, if every man, who is placed upon this globe, is to act a part upon which an *eternity* of *happiness* or *misery* to himself depends, (which is supposed to be the case;) then, most certainly, every man ought, in *justice* and *equity*, to have *fair play* for his *life*, or rather for his *soul*; and not to be put under *any disadvantage*, in a case where points of such vast importance to him are depending. And can we suppose, that the great and wise *Maker* and *Governor* of the universe, who has no interest to serve by the misery of his creatures, and who is much more concerned to secure their happiness to them, than they are to secure it to themselves; — Can we, I say, suppose, that he would *so constitute* things, as that out of, and from that constitution, would necessarily arise such *eminent danger* to a whole species of beings, as that it is great odds if even a few or any
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of them should escape? than which no supposition can be *more contrary* to *true piety*. And yet this is the very case, if reason be not a sufficient guide in matters of religion.

Indeed, if any individual of our species is *regardless* of his highest interest, if he *neglects* or *abuses* any capacity or power he is invested with, or if he brings any *disadvantage*, *difficulty*, or *danger* upon himself, which it was in his power to have avoided or prevented, all such are justly chargeable upon *himself*. But as to those difficulties, disadvantages, and dangers, which unavoidably arise from the *constitution* of *things*, and which could not possibly have been avoided (which is the present case) these are only chargeable upon the *Author* of that constitution. If it should be said, that it was in *Adam's* power to have prevented every thing of this kind; and that all is owing to his *miscarriage*: I answer, as above, that the disadvantage to mankind is the *same*, whether it was in *Adam's* power to have prevented it, or not; and that it is *unequal* and *repugnant* to *reason* for things to be *so constituted*, as that the right use and exercise of the faculties of a whole species of beings, upon which our *all* depended, should be risked upon *one single fact only*; or that it should be left to the will and pleasure of *Adam*, whether his numberless offspring should be involved in such *eminent danger*, or not; which danger, if *Adam* miscarried (and which proved to be the case) it would be great odds, if even a few or any of our species should escape. Again,

If it should be farther added, that reason is not a sufficient guide in matters of religion, and that *divine revelation* was kindly given of God to man, to *supply* the *defectiveness*, or *insufficiency* of reason in that respect; for if reason had been a sufficient guide in matters of religion, then there would have been no need of revelation:

I answer; that if this were the case, then the *original constitution* of *things* must have been very

defective, as I observed above; because then, there would have been a whole species of beings, made accountable for their actions, without being furnished with capacities and powers *sufficient* to answer the purposes of such creatures; and then numberless millions of our species would have been very *unequally* and *unkindly* dealt with, because they have been *destitute* of such a divine revelation, as would have supplied the defect which arose from the original constitution of things. For as to the *Jewish revelation*, that was not intended to be a guide in matters of religion to *all* our species, but only to the *Jewish nation*. And as to the *Christian*, many ages were past before it was given; and since it has been given, it has been far from prevailing all over the world; and consequently multitudes of our species have been very *hardly* and *unkindly* dealt with. But surely, if the original constitution of things had been thus *defective*, as the present objection supposes; and if God had kindly provided a revelation to *supply* the *defect*, he would have given it to the *whole species*; because otherwise the supply is not *equal* to the defect, nor does it answer the kind purpose of the Creator towards his creatures. The deficiency, in this case, being *general*, as it affects the whole species; and it being such as all are *involuntary* in, with respect to the bringing it upon themselves (*Adam* and *Eve* only excepted) and such as it was not in the power of any to *prevent* or *remove*; therefore, in reason and equity, the supply to that deficiency should have been *as general*. And in this case divine revelation is not to be considered so much the produce of *bounty*, as of *justice* and *equity*. For if man is an *accountable* creature, who is answerable to God for his actions, and who will be *rewarded* and *punished* in another world, according as he behaves himself in this; and if he is not invested with such a capacity or power, as is *sufficient* for these purposes; and if divine revelation is provided as a *supply* to this deficiency (which is supposed to be the case)

case) then, I say, that every man has a *right*, by the laws of common equity, to that revelation; and if it be withheld from any of our species, then they are very *unkindly* and *unequally* dealt with. But seeing divine revelation has not been afforded to *all*, and thereby it has not been a *supply* to the aforesaid *general defect*; from hence, I think, I justly infer, as above, that either reason *is*, or else that *it ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion. And,

Supposing reason to be a sufficient guide in matters of religion; yet it will not follow (as is urged in the objection) that there is no use for, nor *need of revelation*. Reason (like divine revelation) is liable to be *neglected* or *abused*. And this, I think, was the case of the *Pagan world*, in which they were so far from attending to, and following their *reason* in matters of religion, that, on the contrary, they laid it aside, for the most part, and committed themselves to the guidance of *priests*, and *oracles*, and *pretended divine revelations*. And this introduced all those vile and abominable things, both in speculation and practice, which prevailed amongst them; and which, if they attended to and followed their reason, they could not possibly have fallen into. And as this became *generally* the case; so the most *noble* and *valuable end* of a revelation to mankind, under such circumstances, was to bring them back to a *right use* and *exercise* of their *reason* in matters of religion; and thereby to deliver them from the bondage and corruption of all *pretended divine revelations*, and all the abominable burthensom and hurtful *superstitions*, and *idolatry*, they were sunk into, and to restore them again to a *manly* and a *reasonable service*; and consequently, to the answering the great end and purpose of their *creation*. And when a revelation is *so constituted*, and *suit*ed to answer the purposes aforesaid to mankind; then, surely, it must be allowed to be of the *greatest use* and *benefit* to them under the forementioned circumstances, supposing reason to be a sufficient guide in matters

of religion. And if reason, when carefully attended to and followed, is a sufficient guide in matters of religion (which most certainly *ought* to be the case) then every man has the *divine law* written upon his *heart*, which is as much obliging and binding upon his *conscience*, as any law written upon *paper*, or *tables of stone* can be. Again,

If it should be farther urged, that as the *divine law* is broken by our transgressions; so the *divine justice* must be satisfied, before the *sinner* can be acquitted: and as the divine justice was *satisfied* by the sufferings and death of *Christ*, (and thereby the divine law was secured from *contempt*, and God's *indignation* was shewn against sin, and likewise sin was *discouraged*) so *faith* in *Christ* is required, as a *prerequisite* to our being sharers in the *benefits* of his death; and that reason is altogether incapable of *discovering* these points:

I answer; that reason cannot possibly make *such* discoveries, is readily granted; because reason cannot be supposed capable of discovering such points as are *repugnant* to it self, which is the present case. Surely nothing can be more repugnant to *reason*, than that God should *remove* his displeasure from *one person* that is guilty, by the *sufferings* of *another* that is innocent; because this would be to punish the *innocent*, that thereby he may take occasion to let the *guilty* go free; than which nothing can be more *unequal* or *unreasonable*. And to say, that the person who suffered; *voluntarily* undertook to bear that burden, does not alter the case at all; because it makes no *real alteration* neither in the *sufferer*, nor in the *sinner*: that is, neither of them is *more* or *less* guilty or innocent upon that account. And as it is sin (which is *personal*, and which cannot be transferred from one to another) which renders the sinner the *proper object* of God's displeasure; so the sinner must and will continue to be the proper object of *displeasure*, till his person is *so changed*, (which is done by repentance and amendment of life) as renders

ders him *personally* the proper object of God's *mercy*. And when the sinner is *thus* personally changed, as that he becomes the *proper object* of God's mercy hereby, then it is that *personal change* in him, and *that only*, and not any thing which is done or suffered in and by the person of another, which can, in reason, be the *ground* of God's mercy and forgiveness to him. And,

To say, that *divine justice* must be *satisfied* before the *sinner* can be *acquitted*, is to render the case yet worse; because then there can be no room, nor place for God's *mercy* to be exercised at all. For justice, in the present case, consists in two points, *viz. first*, in punishing the *offender*, and *him only*; and, *secondly*, in proportioning the punishment to the *demerit* of the crime; and to depart from these, or either of them, is to depart from justice. So that if divine justice must be satisfied, before the sinner can be acquitted, then the sinner must not only suffer in his *own person*, but he must *so suffer*, as that his sufferings bear an *exact proportion* to the demerit of his crimes; and when he has done so, there can be no place for the exercise of God's *mercy*, because it will be the sinner's *right*, who *thus* suffers, to be discharged without it. And,

As to the *sufferings and death of Christ*, when considered as evils laid on an innocent person, these may call for justice to be executed, in punishing his *Afflictors*; but they cannot possibly satisfy justice for the faults of others: because justice requires that the *sinner*, and *he only*, should suffer, or be punished for sin, as I observed above. For as *transgression* is the only *just* ground or reason of punishment; so to punish the innocent, is to punish without any just ground or reason for it, which is manifestly *unreasonable* and *unjust*. And to consider *one unjust action*, as a satisfaction to *justice* for another, is very absurd. And,

Such a procedure is so far from securing the *law* from *contempt*, that on the contrary it renders
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both the *law*, and the *lawgiver contemptible*. For as the justice and equity of the law consists in punishing the transgressor of that law, and the transgressor only, and in proportioning the punishment to the demerit of the crime ; so to punish the *innocent* in the place of the guilty, and to let the guilty go *free*, is contrary to *justice* and *equity* ; and consequently it renders both the law and the lawgiver contemptible. One great end of all law and punishment is to secure *obedience* to the *law* ; but if the natural order of things is thus *perverted*, by treating the *innocent* as *guilty*, and the *guilty* as *innocent*, then obedience is left *unguarded* and *unsecured*, and law and punishment become only stalking-horses to the *passion*, and *resentment* of the lawgiver. And,

As to *sin*, when it is considered *abstractedly* from the *sinner*, it is a mere empty abstracted notion, and as such cannot be the object either of favour or displeasure : so that when God is said to be displeased with or shew his indignation against sin, it is not sin when considered abstractedly, but it is the *sinner*, or the *person* who is guilty of *sin*, who is the object of that displeasure. And it is exceedingly absurd to suppose, that God's indignation can be shewn against *sinners*, by his *excusing* the *guilty* from punishment, and by his *afflicting* and *punishing* a person that is *innocent* in their stead ; because the action itself, naturally and necessarily shews the contrary. That is, it shews (if it shews any thing) God's dislike of the *innocent*, and his *approbation* of the *guilty*. And such a conduct is so far from *discouraging*, that on the contrary, it is rather an *encouragement* to *sin* ; seeing upon the present supposition, it seems to be a matter of *indifferency* to God, (so he does but punish) whether he punishes the *guilty* or the *innocent* ; or rather in the present case, the greatest mark of respect, is shewn to the transgressors of God's laws ; because he *punishes* the *innocent*, and lets the *guilty* go *free*. And,

Tho' *faith* be considered as necessary to render men sharers in the *benefits* of Christ's divine mission, as it leads them to repentance and amendment of life (which mission he lost his life in maintaining, and so by a figure of speech, men are said to be sharers in the benefits of Christ's death, when they are sharers in the benefits of that divine mission, which he laid down his life to maintain,) yet it is not their *believing*, when considered barely as an act of the *understanding*, but it is what that faith is introductive to, *viz.* their *repenting* and *turning to God*, and bringing forth fruits *meet* for *repentance*, which is the *true ground* and *reason* of God's mercy, and loving kindness to them. Faith in or an assenting to the truth of any proposition, whether human or divine, when considered *abstractedly*, cannot in the nature of the thing, render men *more* or *less pleasing* to God; because, in this case, they are so far passive, as that if they attend to the subject, they cannot possibly think and judge otherwise of that proposition than they do; and therefore it is *repugnant* to *reason*, that God should make it the *ground* of his favour or displeasure. And,

As the doctrines I have now been examining, are manifestly *repugnant* to *reason*, and therefore cannot be the *truth* of the case; so if it could be made appear (which I think cannot be done) that those doctrines are contained in the *christian revelation*; then that would be an *evident proof*, that that revelation could not possibly be *divine*. It is true, *Christ* is said to *redeem us to God by his Blood*, and many *like expressions* are contained in the *New Testament*; but then these are plainly figures of speech, which were not intended to be a *foundation* and *support* for the doctrines I have now been considering. And as those doctrines *cannot* be discovered by reason, because they are *repugnant* to it; so, I think, what is urged on this head, does not prove, that reason is not a sufficient guide in matters of religion. Again,

If it should be farther urged, supposing that *repentance* and *reformation* be the only proper *ground* or *reason* of God's shewing mercy to the transgressors of his law; yet this is what *reason* could not *discover*, at least it could not come to any *certainty* that this would be the case :

I answer ; that repentance and reformation are proper grounds of forgiveness, is most evident to reason *when discovered* ; and to say, that reason *cannot* discover, what is most *agreeable* to itself when discovered, is presuming a point, without the least ground for it. And farther, to say that no man who was *destitute* of divine revelation, ever did discern the *fitness* of such a conduct, *viz.* of pardoning such a transgressor upon his repentance and amendment of life, is venturing to say what surely is not true. And if reason may be supposed *capable* of discovering the fitness of such conduct, of which, I think, we may be certain that it is ; then reason may come to a *certainty*, that this would be the case, with respect to *God* and his *sinful creatures*, upon their *repentance* and *amendment of life* ; because reason assures us, that *God* will *always* do what is right and fit, and that he *never* will act otherwise. But admitting that reason is *uncapable* of discerning the *certainty* of this point, and that such certainty is *necessary* to be *discovered*, in order to engage mankind in the practice of their duty under their present circumstances; then, I say, that reason *ought* to have been sufficient for this purpose, seeing divine revelation, which makes the discovery, has been *withheld* from much the *greatest part* of our *species*. The case is the same, with respect to the *knowledge* and *certainty* of the *resurrection* of the body, and a *judgment* to come ; of a *future state* of rewards and punishments, and of the *perpetuity* of these. For, if the knowledge and certainty of these, are *necessary* to engage mankind in the practice of their duty, as they are by the present constitution of things unavoidably subjected to manifold

fold and strong temptations; and if reason is *incapable* of making *such discoveries*: then, I say, that in justice and equity it *ought*, however, to be sufficient for these purposes; seeing (as I said before) divine revelation, which makes these discoveries, has been *withheld* from much the *greatest part* of *mankind*. Again,

If it should be farther urged, *lastly*, that reason is not a sufficient guide in matters of religion, as is evident from the *state* of those *ages* and *parts* of the *world*, which have been *destitute* of divine revelation; who, having *only* their reason to guide them, have run into the most *vile* and *abominable principles* and *practices*; of which my *Lord Bishop of London*, in his *second* pastoral Letter, has given a large and full account:

I answer; it is true, that reasonable creatures, or creatures endowed with the use of reason, when they *neglect*, or *abuse*, or lay aside the *use* of that noble faculty, are *liable* to run into the most vile and abominable opinions and practices; and this is abundantly evident from my *Lord Bishop of London's* account of this matter: but, that reason, when duly and faithfully exercised, is not a *sufficient guide* in matters of religion, does by no means follow, from any thing which his *Lordship* has advanced on this head. But farther; supposing what my *Lord Bishop of London* has urged, be to his purpose, and that it proves his point, *viz.* that reason is not a sufficient guide in matters of religion; yet then, I say, that it does not take off the force of *my argument*. For if the *true ground* of the pagan world's running into all those vile and abominable opinions and practices; was the *weakness* and *deficiency* of *reason* to have directed and guided them better; then, surely, reason *ought* to have been sufficient for this purpose; that so those pagans might have been *prevented* from running into such extravagances, or might have been *inexcusable* if they had: I say, that in *justice* and *equity*, this

ought to have been the case, seeing those *pagans* have been destitute of divine revelation.

Upon the whole, I think, I have made good the point I undertook ; and have shewn, that either reason *is*, or else that it *ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion. And if reason *ought* to be a sufficient guide in matters of religion (that is, if it be *repugnant* to *reason* for the case to be otherwise ;) then this is a fair step towards *proving* it to be so. Amongst the several arguments which have been urged against the doctrine of *absolute election*, and *reprobation*, none, I think, has bore harder upon that doctrine than this, *viz.* that it is *repugnant* to *reason*. That is, it is *unreasonable*, that God should make a species of creatures *capable* of future bliss or torment, and that he should *pre-ordain* a few of that species to a state of unspeakable and eternal happiness, and the rest of them to a state of extrem and eternal misery: which determination is supposed to result solely from *sovereign* and *arbitrary pleasure*, antecedent to, and independent of the behaviour of those creatures, which might render them the proper objects of his approbation or dislike. And as such a procedure is *unreasonable* in itself, and is thereupon *repugnant* to our natural notions of the Deity ; so this has been very *justly* esteemed a *conclusive argument* against the truth of the aforesaid doctrine. In like manner, if it be *unreasonable*, (of which, I think, every man is a judge, when the case is fairly proposed to him) that God should call a species of creatures into being, should render them accountable for their actions, and will reward or punish them in another world, according as they behave themselves in this; and yet should not furnish them with a *capacity*, or *power*, which (when faithfully and duly exercised) is *sufficient* to discover what it is they are accountable for ; what it is which will render them the proper objects of God's favour or displeasure ; nor to discover those motives to right behaviour, which
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are an equal balance to all the temptations that the present constitution of things unavoidably leads them into : I say, if such a conduct be repugnant to reason, and contrary to our natural notions of the Deity ; then this is a good *argument* to prove that it is not the truth of the case. But farther,

I think, my *Lord Bishop of London* allows, that reason is a *judge* in matters of *revelation*. That is, (if I understand the case right, and if hereby the purposes of such a judge are answered to mankind, which surely his *Lordship* must intend) reason is a judge in matters of revelation, in these *four* respects. *First*, of the *internal* characters of a revelation, whether they are *worthy* of God. And, *secondly*, of the *external* evidence which attends a revelation, whether it sufficiently *proves* that it came from God. And in this case, I would urge as above, *viz.* that either reason *is*, or else that *it ought to be*, a proper judge in these matters ; because otherwise man has nothing to *guard* and *secure* him against delusion and imposition. *Thirdly*, Reason *is*, or *ought to be*, a proper judge of the *sense* and *meaning* of divine revelation ; because otherwise divine revelation may become very *hurtful* to us. Thus, in the *christian* revelation, we are required to *be careful for nothing* ; to *take no thought for the morrow* ; *not to resist evil* ; and the like : which precepts, if not under the direction and guidance of *reason*, may be very *prejudicial* and *hurtful* to mankind. And which by the way shews, that *reason*, or *the reason of things*, is a rule of action *prior* to that of revelation. Again, *fourthly* and *lastly*, Reason *is*, or *ought to be*, a proper judge of *every part* of that revelation, of which it is said that it is divine ; because divinely inspired men may *pretend* to be so, when that is not the case ; and therefore they are not *absolutely* to be relied upon. An instance of this we have in the *old prophet*, mentioned 1 *Kings* xiii. 18. *He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art, and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord,*

saying, *Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread, und drink water ; but he lied unto him.* And that this impostor was divinely inspired, or had immediate communications with the Deity at *some other times*, and that too after he had been guilty of this vile imposition, is manifest from verse 20. where it is said, *And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back, &c.* Here we see, not only that the poor credulous prophet lost his life by his credulity ; but also, that divinely inspired men are not *absolutely* to be depended upon, in all that they may put upon us as the *word of God*. Credulous I call the forementioned prophet, because, I think, that is *all* the fault which in reason he could be charged with. For as to his *obedience to God's commands*, it is plain he intended it through the whole, tho' the *other* prophet wickedly deceived him, and thereby betrayed him into a transgression, if it may be so called. And seeing divinely inspired men may *deceive us*, by pretending to have informations and instructions from the Deity, when that is not the case, as is manifest in the instance above: therefore, I say, that reason *is*, or else that it *ought to be*, a proper judge, not only of *every revelation*, of which it is said that it is divine, but also of *all the parts of every revelation*, which comes forth under that character. What I would observe is, that if we may justly conclude, that reason is a *proper judge in matters of revelation*, because, in reason and equity, it *ought to be so*, (and which, I think, must be the foundation of my Lord Bishop of London's argument in the present case, supposing he were put upon the proof of this point ;) then, I say, that we may as fairly conclude, that reason is a *sufficient guide in matters of religion* ; because, in justice and equity, that *ought to be the case*. To this I may add, that if reason be a *proper judge in matters of revelation* (which, I think, is an allowed case) ; then, surely, no reason can be given, why it should

should not be a *sufficient guide* in *matters of religion*, seeing one seems to be as much within the *province* of reason as the other; and what is a *proper qualification* for the *former*, seems equally to be a proper qualification for the *latter*. Besides, if reason is *at all* a guide in matters of religion (which, I think, will not be denied); then, surely, it may be a *sufficient guide*; because *one part* of our duty is as agreeable to reason, and (for any thing that appears to the contrary) is as *easy* to be discovered by it *as another*. However, this is not the point I undertook to maintain; that being only to shew (which, I think, I have done) that either reason *is*, or else that it *ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion.

Before I leave the subject, I think it proper to observe, that whether I have made good what I proposed or not, (which must be submitted to the judgment of my readers) yet this I know, that I have not intended to *injure divine revelation*, or to serve the cause of *infidelity* hereby. Neither do I perceive, that what I have here offered, can any way serve *such* purposes. All divine revelation must be *agreeable* to reason; for otherwise no external evidence can possibly *prove* it to be *divine*. And if all divine revelation be *agreeable* to reason; then, surely, the *shewing*, or *endeavouring* to shew, that reason either *is*, or that it *ought to be*, a sufficient guide in matters of religion, cannot be injurious to divine revelation. Besides, *those men* who think reason to be a sufficient guide in matters of religion, and who think themselves obliged to act agreeable to reason; such men, I say, can reap no advantage by *discarding* divine revelation; because reason does as much *oblige* them to their duty, as any divine revelation can do; and because all obligations, arising from revelation, are *originally* founded in reason. And as for those men whom reason will not oblige nor restrain, revelation is not likely to have any great influence upon them. The
 outcry,

outcry, therefore, that is made upon the *exalting* of reason, (as it is called,) and the pretence that this is done to run down *divine revelation*, and to serve the cause of *infidelity*, is, I think, a mere invention ; which serves only to render those persons contemptible, who are for a *reasonable religion* : that is, for a religion which is fit and proper for such a rational creature as man is ; and such, surely, the *christian religion* must be allowed to be. If religion and divine revelation are in any *danger* of suffering from this quarter, the danger must arise, not from the *exalting*, but from the *depressing* of *reason*. For if those, to whom the instruction of *mankind* in matters of religion and divine revelation, is committed, are disposed to captivate the *understandings* and *consciences* of the people, and thereby make themselves *masters* of those whom they are appointed to serve, (which sometimes hath been the case, and therefore ought carefully to be guarded against;) then they represent religion, and divine revelation in a *dark* and a *mysterious dress*, thereby to make the greater advantage upon the weakness and ignorance of the people. And then *reason* is to be *depressed* as much as it can be ; because its light tends to dispel the mist which they are for introducing. And by this means, religion and divine revelation are made subservient *not* to the *good* and *benefit*, but to the *hurt* and *damage* of mankind ; and are indeed, only *stalking-horses* to the pride and avarice of those, who assume to themselves the sole power of teaching and explaining them. A sad instance of this we have in the *church* of *Rome* ; in which, as *reason* is laid aside, so religion is sunk into the *dress* of *paganism*. And as the *understandings* and *consciences* of the people are captivated to their pretended guides ; so all is made subservient to gratify the *lusts*, and *passions*, and *avarice* of a vicious clergy. Ought not *Protestants* therefore to be upon their guard, when *reason* is attacked ? seeing that every *depression* of reason is a step to *popery* ; and seeing that

that reason is our *only security* against it. Certain it is, that when *reason* is laid aside in matters of *religion* and *divine revelation*, then these may be molded into every shape, and made to serve every purpose.

Let me then intreat my *fellow Protestants*, especially the *laity*, to contend for, and hold fast their *reason*, and to follow its guidance in matters of religion, and divine revelation: this being their best security against *popery*, which some think gains ground among us. For if once we let go our *reason* in matters of *religion* and *divine revelation*, we are in danger of being captivated to the *see of Rome*, or to a *body of Clergy* who may be equally injurious to us. The *power* of the *clergy* in the church of *Rome*, which hath done so much mischief in the world, doth not spring up in a day; but it arose gradually, (such power being too monstrous to be put upon the world at once,) and this may be the case among *Protestants*, if timely care be not taken to prevent it. However, whether we of this nation may have any *just ground* to apprehend danger, is out of the reach of my enquiry. What I would observe is, that others harm ought to be our *warning*: and that *we*, as well as *all other protestants*, ought to be upon our guard; especially when *reason* is attacked, the free use thereof being our best *preservative* and *security* against all *corruption* and *imposition* in matters of religion, and divine revelation. And that as the *interest* of the *clergy* seems to be distinct from the *common interest* of *mankind*; so it is the interest, and ought to be the care of *all societies*, not to be brought under the power of any *body of clergy* whatsoever.

S O M E
R E F L E C T I O N S
U P O N

The comparative excellency and usefulness of moral and positive duties.

AS moral and positive duties are, in a late controversy, put in competition with respect to their excellency, &c. And as it is a point in dispute to which of these the preference ought to be given, so I have thought proper to make a few reflections on this subject, because, I think, it is a matter which nearly concerns mankind. And that I may be fully understood, I will shew what I mean by moral, and what by positive duties; and what are the true grounds of our obligation to obedience in either case; and thereby set the point in question in as clear a light as I can.

By moral duties, I understand the performance of such actions as are in themselves right and fit to be performed by every intelligent being, or moral agent, in equal circumstances; which fitness results solely from the nature and reason of things, when considered abstractedly from, and antecedent to any promulged law, whether human or divine. And that there is such a fitness and unfitness arising from, and founded in the natural and essential differences in things, when considered abstractedly from, and antecedent to the determination of any intelligent being concerning them; is, I think, as clearly evident as that the whole is equal to all its parts, or as any other self-evident proposition. And to suppose a power in God to constitute such a difference, when there is none in nature, is very absurd; for as right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error,

error, necessarily suppose a natural difference in things, (take away the difference and there can be no such distinction, crooked and strait cannot take place without a difference in nature) so to suppose a power in God to constitute such a difference, when there is none in nature, is to suppose that things can differ while they are alike, which is a contradiction.

Pleasure and pain are plainly distinct and different in nature, the one is naturally the object of our choice, and the other of our aversion and shunning; and this is manifestly the case when considered abstractedly from and antecedent to any divine determination concerning them. And as pleasure is manifestly preferable to pain, so the communicating of pleasure is preferable to the communicating of pain, when these are considered simply in themselves, and abstractedly from any other consideration. There may, indeed, be cases so circumstanced, as that the communicating of pain may be preferable to the communicating of pleasure; but this does not arise from pain's being preferable to pleasure, when considered abstractedly, but only from the particular circumstances of those cases. And when I say, that the communicating of pleasure is preferable to the communicating of pain, my meaning is, that the communicating of pleasure is an action which, in itself, is kind and good; it is commendable and praise-worthy; and therefore, in reason, is right and fit to be performed: Whereas the communicating of pain is an action which is unkind and evil, it is disapproveable and blame-worthy; and therefore, in reason, is wrong and unfit, and consequently the former is preferable to the latter. And this difference betwixt the communicating of pleasure and pain, and the preference which is due to the former, does not arise from any law of God, or from any divine determination concerning them, but from the natural and essential differences in things, and must and will always be the same, whether God interposes and determines any thing concerning them,

or not *. So that, from the natural and essential differences in things arises a rule of action, which all intelligent beings, or moral agents, ought, in reason, to direct and govern their behaviour by.

Besides, admitting the supposition, that wisdom and folly, right and wrong, good and evil, just and unjust, &c. are not founded in nature, but depend upon the will of God to constitute what shall be each of these: then, I say, that God might, if he had pleased, have reversed these; that is, he might have constituted what is wrong to have been right, what is unjust to have been just, what is evil to have been good, and the like. If it should be said, that God could not have done this, because then he would not have been God; I answer, if by his not being God be meant he would not have been wise, just, good, &c. which is the moral character of that being whom we characterize by the term *God*: then, I say, that God would have been God in that case equally as much as now. That is, he would then have been equally just, wise, and good, if he had conformed his actions to what he had then arbitrarily constituted to be justice, wisdom, and goodness, as he now is just, wise, and good, by his now conforming his actions to what he has now arbitrarily constituted to be each of these. But if by God's not being God, be meant his being destitute of that wisdom, justice, and goodness, which is in itself intrinsically such, and which is, in reality, the true and proper moral character of the Deity, and which renders him the most lovely and amiable of all beings; then this plainly supposes, that all these are founded in nature, and are what they are, *viz.* wisdom, justice, goodness, &c. antecedent to, and independent of any divine determination concerning them. And,

Here I beg leave to observe, what a desperate game some men are disposed to play in order to gain a dominion over the understandings and consciences

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* See *Supplement to the Previous Question*, p. 35, 36, 37. Or my *Collection of Tracts*, p. 233, 234.

ces of the people: (which tyranny we of this nation are happily delivered from, and from which may we always be preserved) namely, they will venture to render morality, and all religion, uncertain and precarious, by giving up and disowning the principle upon which all argument and reasoning, with respect to these, is founded, and so risque the whole rather than lose their point. For if right and wrong, just and unjust, wisdom and folly, good and evil, have no foundation in nature, and if it depends upon the will of God what shall or shall not constitute each of these; then it must surely be allowed, that all these stand upon a very precarious bottom; because God may be constantly altering his will, and his determinations, with respect to them: that is, what God constitutes to be wise and good to day, he may constitute to be foolish and evil to-morrow, for any thing we know, or for any grounds we have, from which we may justly conclude the contrary; so that we can never come to any certainty what is right and what is wrong, what is pleasing and what is displeasing to God, and the like; because we have no certain principle to reason from, with respect to them, and consequently the foundation of morality, and all religion, must be destroyed.

If it should be said, that as it depends upon the will of God to constitute what shall be good or evil, just or unjust, right or wrong, &c. to his creatures; so he will always declare what his determinations are with respect to them; which declaration we are to rely upon, and reason from, at all times, and in all cases: and if at any time he should alter or change such his determinations, with respect to these, then he will declare or make known his will, with respect to such alteration: I answer, that God will thus reveal his will, as aforesaid, is presumed without the least ground: for, as upon the present supposition, there is no principle in nature to dispose him to it; so there is no external power which can force him, and consequently we can have no certainty that he

will make any such declaration. Besides, we cannot, upon the present supposition, form any judgment, with respect to a revelation, whether it be divine or not; because we cannot possibly have any previous principle to reason from, with regard to it.

If it should be said, that every intelligent being (the supreme being only excepted) has a particular self-interest of its own, distinct and different from the particular self-interest of every other intelligent being, and that the particular self-interest of every intelligent being is the ground and foundation, and the rule and measure of wisdom and folly, of just and unjust, of right and wrong, of good and evil, to every such being; and consequently he is truly just, wise, and good, who strictly and inviolably pursues his own particular self-interest, in distinction from, and in opposition to the particular interest of any, or the united interest of all other intelligent beings: and he is truly foolish, unjust, and evil, who prefers the particular interest of any, or the united interest of all intelligent beings to his own in any case; and therefore it would be foolish, unjust, and evil, for a man to deny himself any enjoyment, or to suffer the least pain or evil of any kind, for the sake of another, or for the sake of the publick, except he were sure that his present loss would be sufficiently recompenced to him hereafter.

Before I return an answer to what is here urged, I shall make one or two previous observations, *viz.* *first*, that selfishness is not an appetite or passion, (which are immediate excitements to action) but it is a principle which men are to reason from and to govern their present and future behaviour by. *Secondly*, that tho' selfishness be a proper principle of action to intelligent beings, yet it is not, nor ought not to be, the sole principle of action in them; because there is another principle, *viz.* benevolence, which is equally as natural, and as reasonable. And as both these principles are founded in reason; so, when either of them is carried to an extream, it be-

comes unreasonable. And consequently there may be cases in which acting from either of these principles may be reasonable, and that the contrary to either of them may be unreasonable. And,

Here I will consider this world as our all, and exclude futurity out of the question. And in this view of the case, I think, it will appear that benevolence is a proper foundation, or principle of action, to intelligent beings; and that benevolent actions, when they come in competition with selfishness, are in some instances worthy of rational creatures, tho' in other instances the case may be otherwise. That benevolence is a proper foundation, or principle of action, to intelligent beings, is abundantly evident from what I have already observed, *viz.* that the communicating of happiness is preferable to the communicating of misery; and that the communicating of happiness is an action which in itself is kind and good, it is commendable and praiseworthy; and therefore it is fit and reasonable to be performed, and consequently benevolence is a proper principle of action to man, as well as to all other intelligent beings, supposing this world were his all. And,

That benevolent actions, when they come in competition with selfishness, are, in some instances, worthy of rational creatures, will be evident, by giving a case or two in which they plainly appear to be so, and in which the contrary plainly appears to be otherwise. As thus; supposing one man denies himself the enjoyment of a low degree of pleasure, or chuses to undergo a low degree of pain, for a very short space of time, thereby to remove from another a violent fit of the gout, or stone, or the like, without any view of pleasure or advantage to himself, either in this world, or the world to come; in this case, I think, it would be not only a kind and generous, but also a reasonable action; because it appears to me, that the end is worthy of the means by which it is obtained. And as generosity in this instance, would be fit and reasonable; so selfishness,

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if it were made the governing principle of action, would, in this case, be carried to an extream, and would be unfit and unreasonable. Again; suppose a man, in order to procure to himself a low degree of short-lived pleasure, or to avoid a low degree of momentary pain, should bring upon many others the most intense and durable pain and misery; in this case selfishness would be carried to an extream, and would be thereby unreasonable; and its contrary, *viz.* benevolence, would be fit and reasonable; that is, it would be fit and reasonable for a man to prefer the much greater good of many, to so trifling a good to himself, when these come in competition; and this would be the case, supposing this world were his all. And,

If any farther enquiry should be made, wherein the reasonableness or unreasonableness of such actions lie; the answer is, that the actions bespeak or shew themselves to be so; and that, in the nature of the thing, they do not admit of being shewn to be so any other way. And if, in the instances above, those actions are either reasonable or unreasonable, as aforesaid, supposing futurity be excluded out of the question; then there may be other cases, in which the chusing to undergo greater selfdenial, or greater, or more durable pain, in order to promote the good of others, without any view of pleasure or advantage to one's self, either present or future, may be fit and reasonable also. Tho' I grant that benevolence may be carried to an extream, and thereby become unreasonable, as when a man chuses to undergo great and durable pains himself, merely to procure a low degree of short-lived pleasure to another; in this case benevolence would be carried to an extream, and would be unfit and unreasonable. I do not here take upon me to point out the bounds of reasonable or unreasonable selfishness, or benevolence; but all that I observe is, that both selfishness and benevolence are founded in reason; and are, therefore, proper principles of action

tion to man, supposing this world were his all; and that there are cases in which either of these may be carried to an extream, and thereby become unreasonable; and consequently there may be cases in which selfishness ought, in reason, to give place to benevolence; and that there may be other cases in which benevolence ought, in reason, to give place to selfishness. So that neither selfishness, nor benevolence, are the ground and foundation, and the rule and measure of wisdom and folly, of right and wrong, of good and evil, &c. to intelligent beings; but it is that principle of reason which results from the natural and essential differences in things that is the ground and foundation of all, and by which both selfishness and benevolence are to be directed and governed.

Having thus shewn how the case would stand, supposing this world were our all; I now proceed to consider how it will be, supposing a future state, in which God will reward or punish us, according to our behaviour here. And here I observe, that the prospect and certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, does not naturally and necessarily exhibit to us another law, or rule of action, different and opposite to what would have been a rule of action to us, supposing this world to have been our all; but, on the contrary, what is fit and reasonable, and therefore our duty, upon one supposition, is and must be equally the same upon the other. And the reason is evident, because a rule of action is, in order of nature, before the sanctions which are annexed to enforce it, the reasonableness of which rule is, or ought to be, the ground and foundation of those sanctions. That is, a law, or rule, of action, does not become reasonable, by having great and valuable things promised to those who keep it, and severe and terrible things threatened to those who break it; but it is because the law is fit and reasonable in itself, that those sanctions are annexed, to excite and lead men on to a ready compliance with it. This, I say, is, or ought to be

be the case; and it is so with respect to all wise and just administrations. And,

As selfishness and benevolence are each of them proper principles of action in man, each of which is reasonable when kept within due bounds, and each of which is unreasonable when carried to an extream; so the reasonableness, or unreasonableness of either of these, does not arise from any natural relation they stand in to futurity, but from the particular circumstances of each case. And therefore each of these will be reasonable, or unreasonable, whether we take a future state of rewards and punishments into the question, or not. Thus, as in the instances mentioned above, supposing one man denies himself the enjoyment of a low degree of pleasure, or chuses to undergo a low degree of pain for a very short space of time, thereby to remove from another a violent fit of the gout, or stone, or the like, such an action is reasonable; and it is equally so, whether we take futurity into the question, or not. Again, suppose a man in order to procure to himself a low degree of short-lived pleasure, or to avoid a low degree of momentary pain, should bring upon many others the most intense and durable pain and misery; in this case selfishness would be carried to an extream, and such an action would be very unreasonable; and it would be equally so, whether we take a future state of rewards and punishments into the question, or not. And,

As the reasonableness, or unreasonableness of our present behaviour, arises from our acting suitably or unsuitably to the present relations and circumstances we are under, and not from what we may enjoy or suffer hereafter; so God, considered as the governor of the moral world, if he will be God (to use the language of a late writer;) that is, if he will act the part of a wise, just, and good Being, then he must and will encourage, and promote, by his promises, a reasonable behaviour, and no other; and he will discourage, by his threatnings, an unreasonable

reasonable behaviour, and that only, in his creatures; that is, he will command, encourage, and promote such selfishness, and such only, as is under the direction and government of reason, when considered abstractedly from his interposition; and he will forbid, discourage, and condemn such selfishness, and such only, as is unreasonable, when considered abstractedly, as aforesaid. And the same with respect to benevolence. So that if God, in the government of the moral world, acts the part of a just, wise, and good Being (which most certain he does) then he does not intend, by his threatnings and promises, to exhibit to us another law, or rule of action, different and opposite to what would have been a rule of action to us, and our duty, supposing this world to have been our all; but on the contrary, he intends, by his threatnings and promises, to excite and lead us on to a reasonable service; and which would have been equally reasonable, and our duty, whether he interposed and gave any threatnings and promises, or not.

Having made the precedent observations, which, I think, are very material to the main point which I have now under consideration; I return to the objection, which supposes that selfishness is the ground and foundation, and the rule and measure of wisdom and folly, of right and wrong, &c. to all intelligent beings, who have a particular self-interest of their own, and which is plainly the case of man; and consequently, that selfishness is, and ought to be, the sole principle of action to him. Now, tho' these principles are manifestly false, as I have shewn above, and therefore no reasoning from them can be conclusive; yet, for argument sake, I will admit them, and see how the case will stand upon that supposition. And accordingly,

I observe, that if selfishness is the ground and foundation, and the rule and measure of right and wrong, of wisdom and folly, of good and evil, &c. to all intelligent beings, and consequently is the sole

principle of action in man ; then it is so, either in the nature of the thing, or else it becomes so by the will and appointment of God. And whether it be the one or the other, (seeing our present behaviour has no necessary connection with another world,) therefore, if God acts consonant to the nature of things, or to his own determinations, with respect to them ; then he that is the most selfish, with regard to this world, as he is the most virtuous, so he will, of course, be the most pleasing and acceptable to his Maker, and will deserve to be most amply rewarded by him. And he that is the most generous (that is, has the greatest regard for the good of others) as he becomes hereby the most foolish, unjust, and evil ; so, of course, he must and will render himself most unacceptable and displeasing to God, and will deserve the severest punishment from him. I say, that this will unavoidably be the case, whether we consider selfishness to be, in the nature of the thing, the ground and foundation, and the rule and measure of wisdom and folly, of right and wrong, &c. to all intelligent beings ; or whether it becomes so by the will and appointment of God : because, in either case, if God acts suitable to his character, as God, by conforming his affections and actions, either to the nature of things, or to his own determinations concerning them ; then he will, most certainly, pay the greatest regard by amply rewarding, in another world, those who act the most selfish part in this world, seeing our present behaviour has no necessary connection with futurity, as I observed above. And he will shew the greatest dislike, by severely punishing, in another world, those who act the most generous part as to this. Selfishness, with regard to this world, upon the present supposition, ought to have the greatest encouragement from God ; and it would be manifestly wrong in him to offer any thing, whether it regards this life or another, which might check or restrain it. And,

As to publick good, we can have no reason to suppose that God would pay such regard to it, as to require any of his creatures to deny themselves on its account; because, in so doing he must act contrary either to the nature of things, or to his own determinations with respect to them. Publick good, when it stands opposed to private good (upon the present supposition) has nothing valuable in it to recommend it to the choice, either of God or man, but the contrary. And therefore, to suppose that God would thus work upon the hopes and fears of his creatures, by promising them the greatest rewards, and by threatening them with the severest punishments in another world, in order to induce and engage them to act a part here, which is either unnatural and wrong in itself, or else is become so by a divine determination, and that too in the pursuit of an end, *viz.* publick good, which is not worthy of the choice of either, this supposition surely is monstrously absurd. And how favourable soever this doctrine may be to *Hobbism*; yet, surely, it is very injurious to the christian religion; for, upon the present supposition, the christian revelation could not possibly have come from God, because it promises the greatest rewards to the generous (that is, to the most vicious persons;) and to the most selfish as to this world (that is, to the most virtuous persons) it threatens the severest punishments; which, upon the present supposition, is manifestly running cross to nature, or to that order of things which God hath constituted; and therefore such a revelation cannot possibly be divine.

If it should be said, that tho' the promises of the Gospel are annexed to such actions as are subservient to the good of others, or of the publick; yet these actions are not considered as the produce of generosity, but of selfishness, and that a man becomes entitled to those promises only when he performs those actions, on condition, and in expectation of being sufficiently rewarded for them: and therefore

if he performs those actions without any view to such a reward, then he is so far from being entitled to those promises, that, on the contrary, he deserves to be severely chastized for his folly :

I answer ; this is a very sad, as well as a very false representation of the christian revelation ; wherein the promises, which are made to persons who pursue the good of others, and who deny themselves for the sake of the publick, are made to them only, as those actions are the produce of love, that is, of good will to mankind ; and those promises no otherwise belong to them, than as their actions flow from this generous principle. And therefore St. Paul saith of himself, *that if he gave all his goods to feed the poor, and if he gave his body to be burned, and had not charity*, or a benevolent and generous temper of mind, *it would profit him nothing* ; the promises of the gospel would then not belong to him. Besides, if selfishness is the ground and foundation, and the rule and measure of wisdom and folly, of good and evil, &c. and consequently is the only proper rule of action to intelligent beings ; then I say, as before, that seeing our present behaviour has no necessary connection with another world ; therefore God, if he would act suitably to his character as God, must and would recommend and encourage, by his promises, such selfishness only, as has regard to this world. Neither is there any principle in nature which can dispose God to have any regard to the publick good ; much less to promise the happiness of another world to those who (by acting contrary to nature, or to a divine determination) pursue the publick happiness here ; so that, upon the present supposition, the christian revelation cannot possibly be divine.

Here I observe what wretched shifts men will fly to when they are pressed in argument, viz. they will represent benevolent virtue (which in reality is the most valuable, if not carried to an extrem,

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when it comes in competition with selfishness,) as a childish and a foolish thing ; so that a man would be a fool and a blockhead to deny himself any the least enjoyment, or to undergo any the least labour or pain for the sake of another, or for the sake of the publick, were he not sure to be sufficiently recompenced for it in another world. And if this principle be uniformly maintained, then, I think, he would be a fool, &c. who would not rob, and steal, and cut throats, and be guilty of every outrage which lay in the way of his interest, were there not the gallows in this world, and damnation in another, to restrain him. I say, such shifts as these, men are forced to fly to, to support a desperate cause. Tho' indeed, some late writers of controversy are grown so sceptical in argument, that there is no knowing where to find them ; for they will give up a principle in one page, and reason for it in another. And they will invent a great number of idle distinctions, which, I think, can answer no other purpose, than to perplex the case, and mislead their readers. But to return,

As there is a rule of action, founded in the nature of things, which every intelligent being ought, in reason, to direct and govern his actions by, (the first Cause of all things, as he is an intelligent Being, not excepted) so this rule is called *the law of nature* ; because it naturally and necessarily results from the nature, and the essential differences in things. And it is called *a law*, not as being the commandment of a superior, but as it is a rule of action to intelligent beings, and so it answers the purposes of a law to them. And thus St. Paul considers it, *Rom. ii. 12. For as many as have sinned without law, shall perish without law.* That is, as many as have sinned, and thereby rendered themselves worthy of punishment, who have not had any law given them by their Creator (which was the case of the *Gentile world*) such men shall be judged by, and be condemned

demned for the breach of that law, or rule of action, which is founded in the reason of things. Here we see St. *Paul* plainly supposes this rule of action to be a law to mankind, or which comes to the same, he supposes it to answer the purposes of a law to them, *viz.* as it is what they ought to govern their actions by at present, and as it is that by which they will be judged hereafter. But the Apostle is yet more particular, at verses 14, 15. *For when the Gentiles who have not the law (viz. the law of Moses, nor any other law given them by their Creator) do by nature (viz. from a natural sense of right and wrong, of good and evil, &c.) the things contained in the law (viz. the law given them by God, the law of God being founded on, and conformed to the reason of things) these having not the law (viz. having not any law given them by God) are a law unto themselves; (viz. are conscious to themselves of a law, or rule of action, founded in the nature of things, which they ought to be governed by) which shew the work of the law written in their hearts,* (that is, as the law of God is founded on, and conformed to the reason of things; so this principle of self-consciousness shews that God's law is for sum and substance written and impressed upon every man's heart) *their conscience also bearing them witness, and their thoughts, the mean while, either accusing, or else excusing one another.* (That is, the *Gentiles*, who had no law given them by God, were yet conscious to themselves of acting agreeably with, or contrary to, that rule of action founded in the nature of things, and in the mean while, that is, before the day of judgment, their own thoughts acquitted or condemned them accordingly.)

If it should be said, that the law of nature is the law of God; I answer, that it is the law of God, as it is that rule of action, by which God always directs and governs his behaviour towards his creatures. And it is God's law, as he adopts it, and makes

makes it his, by giving it as a rule of action to his subjects, (he being the great Governor of the moral world) all God's laws being founded upon it, and conformed to it. But it is not God's law as founded solely on his will and commandment ; because it is, and ought to be, a law or rule of action to all intelligent beings, whether God willed or commanded it, or not. And,

This law of nature is, in order of nature, above and before all other laws, it being the ground and foundation of them ; all laws, and government, whether human or divine, being originally founded, not in a superiority of power, but in the reason of things, as aforesaid. And as government itself is founded in the reason of things ; so all authority and all laws, flowing from it, ought to be directed and governed by this original and primary law of nature : it being a manifest absurdity to suppose, that any lawgiver can, in reason, have a right to command what is not fit nor reasonable to be commanded. And this is manifestly the case, with respect to all laws, and all lawgivers, whether human or divine : it being equally as unreasonable and unfit, that God should make an unreasonable law, or a law which answers no good end, as that any other lawgiver should act thus, seeing the reason of things is, and ought to be, as much a rule of action to him, as to any other intelligent being. God indeed is our Creator, and as he called us into being without our consent, so hereby he became our common parent, and the natural guardian of our happiness: and hereby he has, in reason, a right to govern us, not by making what law he pleases, but only to rule us for our good ; it being very unequal and unreasonable, that he should exercise any other authority over us, seeing his calling us into being, or his being possessed with such power, as we are not able to resist, does not alter the nature
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of things, by making that fit and reasonable which otherwise would not be so. And,

As this rule of action is founded in the reason of things ; so our obligation to obedience is founded on the same principle. That is, we are, in reason, obliged to yield obedience to this law, supposing no promulged law had ever been given to mankind. Thus the grateful acknowledgment of a favour received, and the making a grateful return for it to proper persons, and under proper circumstances (when and where such returns can be made) are duties which every intelligent being is, in reason, obliged to perform, when considered abstractedly from, and antecedent to, any promulged law of any kind. For whatever, in reason, becomes a law to intelligent beings, those beings will, for the same reason, be obliged to yield obedience to that law. And where there is no reason for a command, there can be no reason for our complying with it, except it be that prudential one of avoiding the evil, which otherwise our disobedience may bring upon us. And this is the case of all laws, whether human or divine. That is, our obligation to obedience, in any case, does not arise from the thing's being commanded, but its being fit and reasonable upon some account or other, when all things are taken into the case (and when considered abstractedly from the will of the lawgiver) that we should yield obedience to that law. For as the reason of things is the ground and foundation of all authority and government ; so it must likewise, in the nature of the thing, be the ground and foundation of all obligations to obedience. And,

As there is such a rule of action founded in the reason of things, as aforesaid ; so the moral perfections of all intelligent beings arise from, and consist in their being perfectly subjected to this law. Thus the moral perfection of the Deity consists in his being absolutely and perfectly subjected to this law

of reason; that is, in his making the reason of things the rule and measure of his affections, and actions, in all his dealings with his creatures. And herein consists the moral perfection of the human nature (when such perfection is attained) *viz.* in being perfectly subjected, both in affections and actions, to this law of reason; and every approach to it is an approach to the perfection of our nature. And if our species were universally and perfectly subjected to this law, then there would be no use nor place for any promulged law of any kind; because the use and end of all promulged laws and government, whether human or divine, is (or at least ought to be) to enforce and lead men on to obedience to this original and primary law of nature. Again,

By positive duties, I understand the performance of such actions, as, in reason, we are not obliged to perform, when considered abstractedly from, and antecedent to any promulged law that requires our performance of them. Positive duties come under a twofold consideration, *viz.* *First*, such as are the produce of mere sovereignty, and are required not to answer any wise and good end; but only to shew the absolute power and dominion which the lawgiver has over his subjects. Or, *Secondly*, such as are instituted to answer some wise and good end; *viz.* to prevent our doing what is evil, or else to lead us (as it were by the hand) into the practice of what is good.

As to the first, *viz.* such positive duties as are the produce of mere sovereignty, the reason of which is founded solely in the will of the lawgiver, and are laid merely as taxes on the subject: in this case we cannot be under any obligation to obedience from the actions themselves; because there is nothing in these actions which can be a foundation for such obligation. And as to their being commanded, this cannot, in reason, oblige us, because there can be no obliging reason given why such com-

mands, or taxes, should be laid upon us ; and therefore, all the obligation to obedience, which we can, in reason, come under in the present case, is only to avoid the inconvenience to ourselves, or others, which our disobedience may unavoidably bring upon us, or them, either by barring the enjoyment of some good, or by introducing some greater evil. For as the end and design of all promulged laws and government, whether human or divine, is (or at least ought to be) to enforce and lead men on to obedience to the original and primary law of nature, or reason ; so if any governor should so far exceed the bounds of his authority, as to command actions which are not, nor cannot be any way subservient to this end, and which serve only to shew the absolute sovereignty of the lawgiver ; the subjects, in such a case, cannot, in reason, be obliged to yield obedience to such laws, any otherwise than as when two evils present themselves, and one or other must unavoidably be submitted to, they are, in reason, obliged to chuse the least. But this cannot be the case with respect to any divine institution ; because God does always make the reason of things the rule and measure of his actions, in all his dealings with his creatures : and consequently he never commands out of mere sovereignty, or for commanding sake, but always with regard to the good of his creatures. All arbitrary commands are instances not of government, but of tyranny ; and are so many marks and instances of the moral imperfection of the lawgiver ; which surely is not the case with respect to God : and therefore all positive duties, which are the produce of mere sovereignty, have no place in our present enquiry. And,

As to the second, *viz.* such positive duties as are required to answer some wise and good end ; namely, to prevent our doing what is evil, or to lead us, (as it were by the hand) to the practice of
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what is good, the ground or reason of such institutions ought to be the ground or reason of our subjection to them. That is, the ground or reason of our obedience to such laws, ought to be, not because they are commanded, but because we would obtain the end which our wise and good lawgiver has appointed these as a means to lead us to. These institutions are not laid on us by way of toll or tax; but are rather held forth to us as handmaids to lead and guide us to our duty; that is, to the practice of those things, which are fit and reasonable in themselves, and so are our duty in the most strict and proper sense of that term. And therefore, these observations become duties, not by being commanded, but by being means to the aforesaid end; and our compliance with these becomes valuable, not by being done in obedience to a command, but by being subservient to the end to which they are directed. And if we should pretend that their being commanded is the sole ground or reason of our compliance with such laws, then this would be to consider these institutions, not as proper means towards the attaining some wise and good end, but as the produce of mere sovereignty; tho' even then, the true ground of our subjection would be, not so much because they are commanded, as to avoid the inconvenience which our disobedience would unavoidably bring upon us, as I observed above. And,

As all positive duties, which are of divine institution are appointed as means to some wise and good end; so they operate as means, not by having any physical influence upon the subject, nor by way of charm; but morally, if I may so call it: that is, by producing in, or leading men to proper reflections, and thereby to suitable and proper affections and actions. Thus, by eating bread, and drinking wine, and remembering Christ, in the performance of these actions, men are naturally led to proper reflections; that is, to take a view of that amiable

character which shewed itself in the mind and life of Christ. And when men thus behold the beauty and amiableness of a virtuous character in the person of another, they are by it naturally invited to chuse to deserve such a character themselves ; and consequently to form their minds and lives according to the pattern of that great example. And thus the forementioned christian institution is made subservient, as a means towards the attaining the most valuable end.

If it should be said, that tho' all positive duties of divine appointment are means to some end ; yet that end may be concealed from us, tho' it is well known to God ; and therefore it is our duty to practise them, tho' we should not be able to discern what that end is : and this might possibly be the case with respect to God's forbidding *Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil* :

I answer ; as all positive duties have not a physical, but a moral influence upon those who practise them, therefore it is highly necessary that the end to which they are directed should be known, because otherwise, that end is not likely to be obtained ; and consequently it is highly fit and reasonable, that the end, which every positive duty is intended to obtain, should be directly expressed, or else plainly pointed out, in and by the institution ; and this is manifestly the case of the christian institutions. The being required to eat bread, and drink wine, and to remember Christ in the performance of those actions, plainly points out to us the end to which those actions, as means, are intended to lead us, *viz.* to an imitation in mind and life of that holy person whom we are hereby required to remember. As to our first parents being prohibited to eat the forementioned fruit, if the eating it had such a physical effect upon their constitutions, as to be a real injury to them, which seems most likely to be the case,

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(supposing it to be a real history) then the prohibition is not a positive, but a moral law, as it forbade our first parents to do injury to themselves: and if so, then this law is impertinently urged in the present case. Tho' it looks much more probable, from the story it self, to be a parable rather than a history; in which, like other ancient fables, beasts are represented as speaking and reasoning like men. The design of which parable seems to be a representation to us, how easily our first parents, even when in a state of innocency, were betrayed into sin. And,

As it is those positive duties which are required of us, as a means to some wise and good end, which come into the present question, and not those that are the produce of mere sovereignty, because it is the former only which can be of divine institution; so those duties which constitute a means, are plainly distinct and different from that end, which they, as a means, are proposed to lead to, and therefore they are not to be blended together. The excellency and valuableness of a means, is only what arises from it, and belongs to it, as a means; and the same may be said of the end; and we are not to transfer these from one to the other in our estimation of them, or in our reasoning about them. Thus, to eat bread, and drink wine, and to remember Christ in the performance of those actions, is made a duty by the christian institution. And as those actions were intended by the kind institutor, to be a means toward the attaining some farther end, *viz.* to lead us to an imitation of that holy person, both in mind and life, whom we are hereby required to remember; and thereby to conform our affections and actions to that rule of action, founded in the reason of things, which the mind and life of Christ were the most perfect pattern of; so the means, and the end, are plainly distinct and different from each other. And tho', in the use of the former, we may be led, that

is, invited to the practice of the latter, and the practice of the latter may follow upon it; yet still they are two different things; one is not the other, and therefore are not so to be considered, neither is the excellency or usefulness of the one, to be transferred to the other.

Having shewn what I understand by moral, and what by positive duties, and what are the true grounds of our obligation to obedience in either case, I now proceed to consider in what respects these may be compared, that thereby we may form a judgment to which of these the preference is due, upon that comparison. And these duties, I think, admit of a threefold comparison. *First*, as they are more or less valuable in themselves. *Secondly*, as we become more or less valuable in the performance of them. And, *thirdly*, as the performing of these render us more or less pleasing and acceptable to God. And,

First, Moral and positive duties admit of a comparison, with respect to the intrinsic worth and value of the duties themselves. And, I think, in this view of the case, the preference is due and ought to be given to moral duties; because with respect to these, there is a real intrinsic worth and goodness in the duties themselves: whereas, with respect to positive duties, these are good and valuable only relatively, as means to an end, and as they are subservient to that end; their worth and goodness arising only from their relation, as aforesaid; so that if those duties are not performed, as means to an end, or if they do not become subservient to that end, then they have not that relative goodness in them, and consequently have no goodness in them at all. From which, I think, it is most manifest, that moral duties are vastly preferable to positive duties, with respect to the intrinsic worth and valuableness of either. Again,

Secondly,

Secondly, Moral and positive duties admit of a comparison, with respect to our becoming more or less valuable in the practice of them. And here again, I think, the preference is due, and ought to be given to moral duties; because, in the practice of these, we become really valuable and praise-worthy, considered abstractedly from all other considerations; whereas, with respect to positive duties, these do not render us valuable, any otherwise than as they are a means to lead us to the practice of moral duties as their end. And then our valuableness, strictly speaking, arises from the practice of moral duties, and not from the way and means by which we are led on, or invited to the practice of them. Barely to eat bread, and drink wine, and to remember Christ in the performance of those actions, and to do this in obedience to a divine command, does not render a man more valuable than he was, antecedent to his performance of those actions; because, in truth, he is not made a better man thereby. But if, in the use of these, he is led on to an imitation of the mind and life of Christ, and consequently to a conformity of his affections and actions to the law of reason, then he becomes more valuable, because, in reality, he is become a better man. So that the valuableness of our persons, in the present case, does not arise, strictly speaking, from the use of the means, *viz.* the practice of positive duties; but only from their end being answered upon us in the practice of moral duties, and which alone renders us justly, and truly valuable. From which, I think, it appears, that moral duties are greatly preferable to positive duties, with respect to our personal valuableness in the use of them.

If it should be said, that obedience to just authority, is itself truly valuable, and the more hard and difficult the thing commanded is, the more valuable is our compliance; because such difficulty is a trial upon our obedience, which renders it the more valuable:

valuable: and consequently, obedience to a positive law, which has no other reason for it, but the will of the lawgiver, is more valuable than obedience to a moral law; because, in the latter case, there is the reason of the thing, as well as the command of the lawgiver to induce us to a compliance with it:

I answer; to command for commanding sake, or to make laws which answer no good end, but only shew the absolute sovereignty of the lawgiver over his subjects, is the produce not of just, but of unjust authority, it being very unequal and unreasonable, that one intelligent being should assume and exercise such dominion over another. And when such unreasonable authority is assumed, we can, in reason, be under no obligation to obedience, but that prudential one of avoiding the inconvenience which our disobedience may otherwise bring upon us, as I observed above. The avoiding of which inconvenience is (I verily think) the principal, if not the only motive, to obedience in all such cases: that is, either our hope or our fear is the principal spring of action to us. And if we should yield obedience to such laws, merely because they are commanded, our compliance could not be the produce of love; because there is nothing lovely in the command, nor in the lawgiver, on the account of it, to excite that affection. So that obedience, in those cases, is no other, nor more valuable, than that of slaves to an arbitrary master. Of which, to say the best, it would be only yielding to the humour and unreasonable will of a lawgiver, whom it would be wrong to contend with, or to disoblige. And obedience surely, in such cases, cannot render a person equally valuable with him who obeys a moral law from a much better principle. However, this is not the case with respect to God, who never makes any such unreasonable laws for his creatures. Again, *Thirdly and Lastly*, Moral and positive duties admit of a comparison, as the practice of these render

us more or less pleasing and acceptable to God. And here likewise, I think, the preference is due, and ought to be given to moral duties; because these render us pleasing and acceptable upon their own account, and for their own sake, as they render us the most suitable and proper objects of divine approbation and affection. The moral perfection of all intelligent beings consists in their being perfectly subjected to the original, primary law of reason, as I observed above. And as the practice of these are steps and approaches towards the perfection of our nature; so most certainly these must, on their own account, render us pleasing and acceptable to that Being, who is the sum and perfection of all moral perfections, if I may so speak: whereas, positive duties do not render us valuable, or pleasing to God, but as they are means to excite and lead us on to the practice of moral duties, which, in reality, do so. God does not require our obedience to his positive laws, as marks and evidences of our subjection to him, because then he would act from mere sovereignty; and these would be acts, not of government, but of tyranny, as they are the produce not of reason, but of the mere will of the lawgiver. And obedience, in such a case, would be no other than that of slaves to a tyrannical master; which, in reality, is no reputation neither to the lawgiver, nor to the subjects. God therefore must require our submission to these his positive laws, as means to an end, *viz.* to excite and lead us on to the practice of moral duties, and thereby to the perfection of our natures. So that it is the end being answered upon us, *viz.* the subjecting our affections and actions to the law of reason, and not the practice of positive duties, which are only means that lead to this end, that render us the proper objects of God's approbation and affection, and thereby pleasing and acceptable to him; and which means, when considered abstractedly from that end, do not

render us pleasing nor acceptable to God at all. From all which, I think, it plainly appears, that moral duties are highly preferable to positive duties, as they render us most pleasing and acceptable to God in the use of them.

Thus I have shewn, that moral duties are highly preferable to positive duties, in all the forementioned respects; and these, I think, are all the ways in which they are capable of being compared. Indeed, positive duties may be subservient to one particular purpose, which moral duties may not, *viz.* to excite and promote an extravagant flight of fancy, and to raise warm and exalted imaginations in mens minds; which, as they flow from an intoxicated brain, so weak and enthusiastic persons are apt to esteem them as acts of great devotion, and their spiritual experiences. But then, I think, this affords no real reputation to positive duties, because that heat, which men feel upon those occasions, is more fitly called christian distraction, than christian perfection, as it tends to distract and mislead mens minds into a wrong judgment of persons and things. For when men find their imaginations thus upon the float, and this too in the exercise of positive duties, then, tho' they work up themselves mechanically into these heats, yet they are too easily led to think that they feel in themselves something which is heavenly and spiritual. And these enthusiastic raptures (if I may so call them) they esteem spiritual experiences, or the work of God upon their souls; and as such, these become evidences to them, that they are good men, and consequently that they are interested in God's favour. And as they raise in themselves, by this means, a fallacious rule to judge of themselves and others by, and a false foundation of hope and comfort; so they are too easily led to have a low and mean opinion of, and to neglect to improve in themselves, that rectitude of mind and life, wherein true christian perfection consists, and which alone will

will render them truly pleasing and acceptable to God.

If it should be said, that positive duties serve to another purpose, *viz.* to the obtaining of God's grace in the use of them, and that this is a point which I have not yet considered: I answer; if by God's grace, be meant God's favour, and good will to his creatures, and if positive duties are considered as means that lead men to the love and practice of moral duties, which render them the proper objects of this grace, then this is a point which I have already considered.

Or, if by God's grace, be meant God's awakening in us by his immediate interposition, suitable reflections, in order to lead us on to proper affections and actions; then, I say, that this is what positive duties themselves were intended to produce in us, without a divine interposition; and therefore such a divine interposition is needless, supposing positive duties are performed as they ought to be. And if they are not performed as they ought, then we have no reason to suppose that God will supply our idleness and inattention, by his immediate interposition. That is, we have no reason to expect, that when we only formally comply with God's positive laws without attending to, and pursuing the end to which they are directed, he will then supply our carelessness and negligence by awakening in us, through his immediate interposition, such reflections as the practice of those positive duties were intended to lead us into. I say, that there is nothing in reason, nor yet in divine revelation, to ground such a presumption upon.

Or, if by God's grace be meant not God's awakening in us proper reflections, as aforesaid, but something farther, *viz.* his acting in us, and upon us, so as to assist and help us in the performance of our duty, which assistance is procured to us in and by the performance of positive duties; then I say,

that those means, *viz.* the practice of positive duties work upon God, and not upon us. And hereby, I think, he cannot, in any propriety of speech, be said to assist us in the performance of our duty ; for if he does what we could do, but would not, then he may be said to do our duty for us, but not to assist us in the doing it ; tho' this is indeed an absurdity, because the duty of one, in the present case, cannot be done by the person of another. Or, if God does what we would do, but cannot, then he does not assist us in the performance of our duty, seeing it is absurd to suppose, that any thing can be our duty which is above our ability to perform. And in this case, I think, we are not made better by God's acting in us, and upon us, because, as far as God is concerned in this matter, so far we are passive, and consequently are not made better by it, seeing one person is not better, in a moral sense, by what is done by the person of another. Besides, this is a groundless presumption, seeing God has not informed us, that he will act in us, and upon us, in consequence of our performing positive duties.

But, if by God's grace attending the use of positive duties, be meant any unintelligible proposition, which, I fear, is generally the case ; then indeed no satisfactory answer can possibly be given ; because, in truth, there is nothing to be replied to. And therefore all those persons, who talk of God's grace attending the use of positive duties, ought, in common justice, to explain those terms, and shew precisely what they intend by them ; and then, I doubt not, but a proper answer may be returned to what is urged above, with respect to the grace of God attending positive duties ; and that it may be shewn, that moral duties are greatly preferable to them, in all respects whatever.

If it should be said, that positive duties are not to be considered as means to an end, in the christian institution, but are themselves christian perfection,
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or approaches to it (to those who rightly use them) because hereby christians have divine communications with the Deity, they experience the power of divine love upon their souls; and they, in the use of these, are carried out in returns of love to God, and joy in him; and this is a foretaste of the happiness and perfection of our natures, and which moral duties are but preparative to:

I answer; that when positive duties lead men to reflect seriously upon the moral perfections of the Deity, and from thence to an imitation and love of God; then indeed those positive duties become really valuable; but then their valuableness is no other than that of means, which arise wholly from the end they become subservient to, which end consists in the practice of moral duties, *viz.* in an imitation of the moral perfections of the Deity, and in loving the most lovely and amiable of all beings. So that positive duties, in the present case, are so far from being the happiness, and the perfection of our nature, that, on the contrary, they are only means which lead to these as their end. And if positive duties do not thus lead men on, in a rational way, to an imitation and love of God, as aforesaid; but only serve to excite in them warm and enthusiastic raptures, and extravagant flights of fancy, and the like, and which weak minds are too apt to esteem the workings of God upon their souls; then these are not christian perfection, but are rather christian distraction, and are far from giving any true value to positive duties, as I have already observed.

Upon the whole, I think, I have shewn, that when moral and positive duties come in competition with respect to their excellency, &c. then moral duties are greatly preferable to positive duties; or rather the difference is so great betwixt them, that they scarcely admit of a comparison in those respects. And in this, I think, I have the opinion
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of many of the writers of the *Old and New Testament*. In the *Old Testament*, when positive duties are considered as ineffectual for obtaining the end to which they were directed, and men lived in the breach of moral duties, whilst in the use of them, then they are considered as vile and abominable in God's sight. And here it is to be observed, that the complaint against the *Jews* was not for that those positive duties were done in obedience to a divine command; neither is there any thing in the history to ground such a supposition upon; but the complaint was, that their hands were full of blood, and the like, whilst in the use of them. So that it was their using these to no good purpose, and their relying upon them as the ground of their acceptance with God, whilst they lived in the breach of moral duties, that rendered these positive duties unacceptable or displeasing to him that appointed them. And,

In the *New Testament*, when positive duties are put in competition with that rectitude of mind and life which the gospel recommends; or in other words, with the practice of moral duties; then they are considered as carnal ordinances, as weak and beggarly elements, and the like.

If it should be said, that these lessening characters are applied only to those positive duties which the law of *Moses* appointed, and not to those appointed to Christians under the gospel: I answer; that all positive duties, as such, are of like kind, and serve a like purpose, (*viz.* to keep men from sin, and to lead them to the practice of moral duties) under every divine dispensation. And therefore, if these appointed under the gospel, do not answer the purpose for which they were intended; or if they are put in competition with moral duties, and made the ground of divine acceptance; in either case they deserve those lessening characters, before referred to; namely, under such circumstances,

stances, and when considered comparatively, as above, they are but carnal ordinances, and weak and beggarly elements, and the like.

If it should be said, that when positive duties are not subservient to the end for which they are appointed, then, strictly speaking, they are not duties, but sins to those who use them. And therefore, in this view of the case, they are not to be compared with moral duties, but only when they answer the end of their institution; because then only they answer the characters of positive duties: I answer; if this be admitted to be the case, then it makes good all that I have been contending for, *viz.* that the valuableness and excellency of positive duties is merely relative, and is derived from the excellency and valuableness of that end, which they, as means, are related to; and consequently, they cannot be equally excellent and valuable with that end, from which their own excellency and valuableness, as means, is derived, and without which they would have no excellency nor valuableness in them at all. And,

Here I beg leave to observe to my reader, that this is a point of no small importance to mankind; because our not carefully distinguishing here, may be the cause of our final miscarriage. Positive duties are appointed as a means towards the attaining some wise and good end, and they are no farther valuable, than as they are subservient to that end, *viz.* to lead us to the practice of moral duties, which, in truth, is the perfection of our nature. Now if we ascribe to positive duties which are the means, that valuableness which only belongeth to the end, then we are in danger of relying upon the bare external compliance with a positive law, without regarding the end to which that law was directed, and so to deceive ourselves to our undoing. This is that fatal rock upon which many religious professions have split: for when men consider the externals of religion,

ligion, (if I may so call them) as the principal and most valuable parts of it, then they are too too apt to rely upon these, as what will render them most acceptable to God, and so to neglect to have that rectitude of mind and life, which alone will render them pleasing in the eyes of their Maker.

This was the case of the *Jews* of old; for as the particular circumstances and temper of that people required, that a greater number and variety of positive duties should be practised by them, than otherwise there would have been occasion for; so they raised the worth of these greatly above their true value; and then they thought that the bare external compliance with those positive laws, would sufficiently secure to them God's favour. Whereas, if those *Jews* had preserved a just sense of the worth and value of positive duties, and had considered them only as means to an end, and that they were no farther valuable than as they become subservient to that end, then they could not have thus erred, and deceived themselves in a point of such importance, as it is manifest they did. And,

This has been too too much the case amongst Christians. They have raised the value of positive duties above what is meet, which has laid a foundation for a multitude of those superstitious practices that have prevailed in the christian world, and which has eat out, as it were, the life and spirit of christianity. So that in some parts of *Christendom* there is little else remaining, but a blind and ungoverned zeal for positive duties, and for such superstitious practices, as education and custom has rendered sacred to them. And indeed this evil is apt to spread and take root in all places, and at all times. For when men are unwilling to part with their vices, then they are glad to lay hold of any principle which will render the practice of those vices easy to themselves. And nothing seems better to answer this purpose, than to raise up the value of positive duties to be equal, or perhaps super-

rior to moral duties ; and then it is easy to suppose, that to abound in the former, will supply the want of the latter ; and thus men deceive themselves to their own destruction. Have we not therefore good reason to take heed to ourselves, when such principles are advanced as are not only manifestly false, but also are likely to prove very hurtful to mankind, and, which, I think, is the present case ? The representing positive duties, as of equal or superior value with moral duties, is not only a false principle, but it has also a sad tendency to mislead mankind in a point of the utmost concern to them.

To conclude ; let me intreat those men, who are for the raising the value of positive duties much above their true worth, and are for making the use of these the ground and foundation of christian perfection, and of our acceptance with God, to consider what they are doing. Sirs, Are you not by this sending us back to Popery ? that being such a religious constitution as abounds with a greater number and variety of positive duties, than any religious constitution amongst *Protestants*, and therefore is the more sure way to christian perfection. Are you not pointing out to men a way to deceive themselves, in a case wherein their highest interest is at stake, by speaking peace to them, or rather by leading them to view themselves in a false glass, and thereby to speak peace unto themselves, whilst their hands are full of fraud and violence, and their hearts run after their covetousness ? whereas, in truth, there is no *peace to the wicked*, saith our God. For if positive duties are represented as of equal or superior excellency and value to moral duties, then men are very easily led to think, that a constant attendance on, and a warm zeal for positive duties, will render them most acceptable to their Maker, tho' they are destitute of that rectitude of mind and life, which the christian religion recommends, and

which the reason of things require, as the only ground of divine acceptance. And this has too often been the case, as the experience of almost all ages have shewn ; so that, by this means, men have deceived themselves to their undoing. These, I think, are consequences which may very easily follow the principle I have now been opposing the advancing of, which looks as if we were setting our faces towards *Rome*, and were longing to return again to the *flesh-pots of Egypt* : but how subservient soever this may be to answer the purposes of a designing clergy, yet surely it is highly injurious to the religion of Christ.

I will only add, that the practice of positive duties is so far from being the perfection of our nature, that, on the contrary, the use of those are marks and evidences of our imperfection, and shews human nature to be in a weak, and in an infirm state, as it stands in need of such help : that is, it shews the danger and aptness we are under to deviate from our duty, when we stand in need of those to recal our attention, and to awaken in us a sense of the obligations we are under both to God and man. But when human nature shall have attained to its perfection, by being perfectly subjected to the original and primary law of nature, or reason, then there will be no use nor place for positive duties ; then these, like faith and hope, shall cease and be no more : whereas charity, or the practice of moral duties, shall remain for ever. Tell me then, ye who hope to obtain perfection by this *Levitical* priesthood of positive duties, and who trust to find acceptance with God thro' these, what rational grounds you have to build such hope and trust upon ? Had not *Abraham*, our father, two sons, one by a bond maid, the other by a free woman ? Nevertheless, what saith the scripture, *Cast out the bond woman, and her son ; for the son of the bond woman, viz. positive duties, shall*
not

not be heir with the son of the free woman, viz. moral duties. So then, brethren, let us strive to be found children, not of the bond woman, but of the free.

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